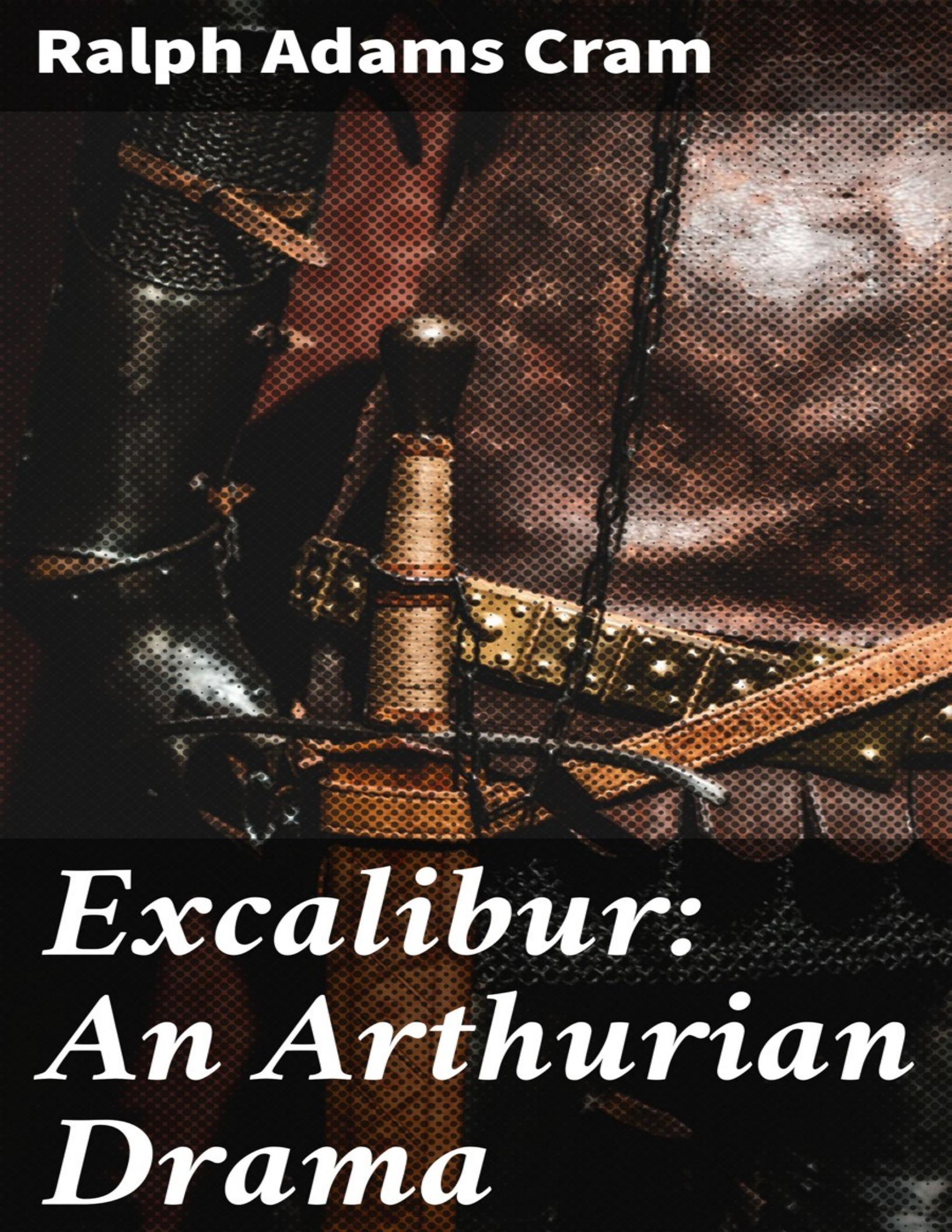




Ralph Adams Cram

*Excalibur:
An Arthurian
Drama*

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Excalibur is the introductory drama of a contemplated trilogy founded on the Arthurian legends as the perfect embodiment of the spirit and impulse of that great Christian epoch we call Mediævalism. The attempt is again made--however inadequately-- to do for the epic of our own race, and in a form adapted to dramatic presentation, a small measure of that which Richard Wagner achieved in an allied art for the Teutonic legends.

--THE AUTHOR

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Arthur Pendragon: afterwards King of England.

Vassals of England:

Uriens, King of Gore,

Nentres, King of Garlot,

Leodegrance, King of Cameliard,

Duke Lucas of the Southfolk,

Duke Brastias of Estsex,

Rience, King of North Wales,

English Knights.:

Sir Launcelot du Lake,

Sir Tor,

Sir Pelleas,

Sir Ector,

Sir Breuse saunce Pit  ,

The Archbishop of Canterbury.

Sir Kay, the Seneschal.

Merlin.

Morgan le Fay, Queen of Gore.

Guenever, Daughter of King Leodegrance.

Dame Columbe, Wife to Sir Kay.

Ettard.

Ysed.

Nimue.

Roman Ambassadors, Barons, Knights, Esquires, Citizens,
Priests,
Monks, Heralds, Pages, and Lake Girls.

Scene, England and Wales.

Prologue

The curtains open on impenetrable darkness.

Merlin (*invisible*).

Pendragon passes; now Pendragon's seed
Shall reign, Pendragon, on Pendragon's throne.
A kingdom passes; now a kingdom's king
Shall raise a kingdom for the King of kings.

(Merlin's figure becomes faintly visible, poised in mid-air.)

Morgan le Fay, rise from the riven rock,
Rise through the waters of the Magic Mere,
Merlin, thy master, calls.

The night is done.

I hear the trumpets of the trampling day,
I see the glimmer of the torch of dawn
Dance like the northern fires along the sky.
The curse is lifted, England wakes again.

Angelic Voices (*above*).

Night passes,
the darkness breaks:
see how the curse
is wafted away!
Down from Heaven,
a beam of light,
Sinks the smile of the Lord.
England, awake!
Rouse to the cry!

Day is at dawn for the land
for God is aweary of wrath.

Merlin.

Hark! how the marshalled choristers of God
Proclaim the dawn that burgeons on the world.

Now falls thy kingdom, Morgan, all awrack,
For Uther dies, and England waits a king.
The rune is written: "Now Pendragon's seed
Shall reign, Pendragon, on Pendragon's throne."
Whereby God's kingdom grows in England.

Rise,
Morgan le Fay! Pendragon passes. Rise!
Pendragon passes, and the night is done.

Morgan le Fay (*below, invisible*).
Pendragon passes, but the darkness holds,
And England sleeps: her dawn shall never come
The while I rule the Magic Mere. The day
Is not for her until I loose my hand;
Until the sunken sea and all the gods
That dwell therein, shall fail and fall away,
Dissolving as the mist that meets the sun.

Merlin.
The sun, the sun! Look where the flaunting host
Of blazing minions mounts the steep of Heaven.
Morgan, thy reign is ended!

Morgan.

At whose word?

Merlin.
The word of God, and here I give it thee.
What time King Uther lived, His hand was stayed,
While England paid the grievous penalty
Of evil done, and thou wast given leave
To scourge us with the curse of paynim gods.
Pendragon passes and the ban is raised;
Pendragon's seed is lord.

Morgan.

Is lord not yet!
Deep in the Magic Mere I hold the Sword:
Take it, magician, if ye have the hand,
Pendragon wins no worship if ye fail.

Merlin.
While Uther lived, the Sword was in thy hold;
Pendragon passes, and the Sword is won.

Morgan.

Thou liest, Merlin, for the Sword is lost!

Merlin.

Thou liest, Morgan, for within my hand
I hold the proof.

Morgan.

The proof?

Merlin.

Excalibur!

(Merlin is illuminated with a dazzling radiance. Four shafts of light shoot upward, downward, and to either hand, as he draws Excalibur, brandishing it aloft in the light.)

Morgan.

Here to me, all ye dwellers in the mere!
Excalibur is won! Cry treason, cry
Unto the uttermost and deepest depth,
Unto the farthest bounds of all the world,
"Excalibur is won!" Black treason stalks
Stark in the sunken sea: your bootless blades
Rust in their scabbards, hingeless hang the doors
That closed my Castle Terrabil, the walls
I reared to ward Excalibur are cleft
In sunder hopelessly. The Sword returns!

Voices.

Queen Morgan calls! Who reft the sleeping Sword
From out our holding? Treason!

Morgan.

All is lost,
And we ourselves hurled from our high dominion
Unless ye win him back. Gain me the Sword!
All hangs on this, the night is broken else.

(Dark phantoms dash across the light, assailing Merlin, who rests motionless. A tumult of cries and of low thunder.)

Merlin.

Pendragon passes, and Excalibur
Is for Pendragon's seed. Morgan le Fay,
The sun is bursting from the black abyss;
Give thee good night, the day breaks on the land.

Morgan.

Spirits of darkness from the Magic Mere,
Win me the Sword!

Voices.

Excalibur is lost,
Our hands are helpless: mighty Merlin conquers.

Morgan.

Win me the Sword!

Voices.

Excalibur is lost;
Woe to the people of the Magic Mere!
Woe to thee, Morgan, crownless queen,
Woe!
Woe!

*(The spirits vanish downward. Morgan's voice is heard
afar off.)*

Morgan.

Hold the Sword, Merlin, guard it with thy craft:
The day is breaking, but the day will die:
Night follows close. The rune is written. Hear!
"Pendragon passes. Now Pendragon's seed
Shall slay Pendragon for Pendragon's lust.
A kingdom passes, now a kingdom's king
Shall lose a kingdom to the lord of hell."

Merlin.

Not while Excalibur is in his hand.

Morgan.

Morgan le Fay shall gain Excalibur.

Merlin.

Not while gray Merlin guards Pendragon's seed.

Morgan.

Gray Merlin passes, and the night befalls.

Magician, guard thyself! the Sword returns.

Merlin.

So runs the rune, but God shall gain the day!
Excalibur is won, and England's dawn
Is breaking: cry adown the winds, "All hail,
Arthur Pendragon, King of England, hail!"
Build thou God's city in the wilderness,
Trample the paynim underneath thy feet
And raise the Cross above a thirsty land.
All hail, Pendragon, servant of the Lord!

Angelic Voices (*above.*)

Hail, Pendragon,
Lord of the Sword!
Crowned of England
saviour and king.
Come forth, thou servant of God,
for the dawn is white on the world,
and Christ shall arm thee to-day
The Sword is won,
hell is confounded,
back from England
cowers the curse.
The Sword Excalibur comes;
follows fast the Kingdom of God!

Merlin.

So answers Heaven and hell is dumb. The bell
Sounds for the day; go then, Excalibur,
Hold in the heavy rock until the king,
Great England's king, shall gain thee for his own.
So do I send thee, Sword of Avalon,
Down to the waiting world. Pendragon comes!

(*He brandishes Excalibur thrice, then hurls it downward:
the light vanishes.*)

Act I

SCENE I. *London. The cloisters of St. Paul's. In
the midst of the garth is a great runic cross, in the base of
which the*

*Sword is buried to the hilt. Merlin is standing beside it.
Without is heard the chanting of the Miserere.*

Enter: the funeral procession of Uther Pendragon,

the body of the king borne in the midst upon a bier. Before walk many monks, priests, and acolytes. Following comes the Archbishop of Canterbury, attended, and behind him King Nentres, King Uriens, Duke Lucas, Duke Brastias, Sir Launcelot, Sir Breuse, and other Knights and Barons.

Men's Voices.

Benigne fac Domine in bona voluntate tua Sion,
Ut aedificentur muri Jerusalem.

Merlin.

Pendragon passes, now Pendragon's seed
Shall reign, Pendragon, on Pendragon's throne.

Men's Voices.

Justificeris Domine in sermonibus tuis,
Ut vincas cum judicaris.

(The procession crosses the front of the stage: as the bier comes in the centre it is set down and the Archbishop raises his crosier and speaks.)

Archbishop.

Lords of the realm and gentlemen at arms,
From all the farthest borders of the land
I summoned ye to answer, under pain
Of ban and interdict of Holy Church.
Uther is dead, and 'gainst his heritage
The ravening kings are leagued. In jeopardy
Lies England, kingless, prey to whoso comes.
Pendragon dies, and dies the last of them
That ruled England by the grace of God.
The House is fallen, and there is no heir.
Nor law nor custom meets this woful plight
Wherein we sink: yet needs must that a king
Rule over us, lest England be disrupt
And parcelled out in shameful vassalage.
To-day is Easter: on this blessed morning
Lord Jesu rose, wherefore of His great mercy
Perchance this day He may give certain sign
Who by His will shall reign. The love of God
Passeth our wisdom. For a miracle
Fall on your knees, besiege the King of kings
With lusty prayer.

Sir Launcelot.

Dear God, a miracle!

Omnes.

O Jesu, hear us!

Archbishop.

Lord Jesu, answer!

By thy Mother's love,

Omnes.

For thy Mother's love!

Merlin.

God hears His children, and the word is said.

Archbishop.

Now speak, magician, if thou hast a tongue,
For in thy words is somewhat ominous
Of welfare to Pendragon's kingdom. Speak!
Where is the sign of God?

Merlin.

Beneath the cross.

Gather, ye barons and ye knights at arms,
Gather, ye commons from the farthest fields,
And look upon the mercy of the Lord!

(He mounts the steps of the cross.)

See ye the Sword that grows in living rock,
Thrust to the hilt within the closing stone?
See ye the scripture writ around it? Read!
Read ye the rune, and reading, rise and do.
This very night, ere yet was day conceived,
Whilst grimly darkness gripped the cringing earth,
I heard a Voice that cleft the sombre night,
And thus it spake, and speaking died away.
"Pendragon passes, now Pendragon's seed
Shall reign, Pendragon, on Pendragon's throne."
And all the night grew white with leaping light
As down the heavenly glory flashed a star,
A streaming fire that thundered to the earth
Riving the rock. Excalibur is come.

Omnes.

Excalibur is come!

Archbishop.

Now unto God
Be laud and honour, that has shown a sign.

Duke Lucas.

Pendragon's seed shall reign? What word is this?
Pendragon's seed is ended. Uther died
Void of all heir, and helpless of his House;
How then shall reign his seed?

Duke Brastias.

How reign his seed
When barren lies his field? Shame shows her head:
No bastard reigns in England!

Merlin.

Peace, ye fools!
A rune is written 'round the rigid hilt,
The which I gain, and straightly give it thee,
Most holy father. Read! and reading, rest.

Archbishop.

"Whoso shall pull this Sword forth of the stone
Is rightwise king, born of all England."

Merlin.

Hear!

Barons and knights and commons; come, essay!
Hale the steel forth, for England lies enwrapped
Around the blade of great Excalibur.

King Nentres.

By right I claim the Sword. Have I to wife
Queen Igraine's daughter? Then to her, Elaine,
And so to me, comes England!

King Uriens.

Traitor king,
Morgan le Fay is mine! From Queen Igraine
I gain the daughter's dowry. Give me place,
For so to me comes England.

Sir Breuse.